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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003760

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: KOREA'S NEW INTEL CHIEF NAMED

REF: SEOUL 03719

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) President Roh Moo-hyun named Kim Man-bok as the new chief of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) on November ¶1. Kim is a career NIS officer and has been serving as the Deputy at NIS since April of this year. The nomination came in the wake of the abrupt resignation of the former NIS chief Kim Seung-kyu on October 26. Kim was investigating a high-profile espionage scandal (reftel) that some say is partly to blame for his departure. Kim would likely assume the Chief position in late November assuming that he receives a favorable report from the National Assembly Intelligence Committee. END SUMMARY.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

¶2. (U) Kim was born in Busan in 1946. He received his bachelor's degree in law from Seoul National University. He joined NIS in 1974 where he has worked since that time. The following are some of his career details:

- Worked overseas at foreign bureaus for 10 years.
- Member of advance team for Kim Dae-jung's trip to Pyongyang in 2000.
- Trained at Sejong Institute where he became an acquaintance of Lee Jong-seok in 2002.
- Appointed NSC Information Management Chief in 2003, under the supervision of Lee Jong-seok.
- Chief of Planning and Coordination (Vice Minister level) since 2004, led NIS reform.
- NIS Deputy Chief since April 2006.

WHERE IS NIS HEADED?

¶3. (SBU) By naming someone from within the organization, the Blue House appears to be trying to maintain the organizational stability and keep a firm grip on NIS (by appointing a loyalist) at the end of this administration's term. Skeptics point to Kim's promotion as evidence that the Blue House is trying to cover-up the spy scandal that is in the early stages of investigation within the NIS. Current media coverage casts doubt on the notion of a cover-up by citing President Roh's approval and support of the espionage

investigation that began in May when he was first approached about the possibility of an investigation.

QUESTIONS SURROUNDING KIM'S DEPARTURE

¶4. (U) Although President Roh has been quoted as saying that "I do not change horses on the battlefield," some critics say that Roh requested Kim's resignation in an internal meeting on October 25. The opposition Grand National Party (GNP) offered its opinion on the matter by saying, "The resignation on the 26th was definitely submitted under the Blue House's influence" and went on to say Kim should remain in office at least until the espionage case was fully investigated. Various Uri Party officials as well as DLP Representative Kwan Young-ghil's Chief of Staff told poloff that the NIS switch was expected and not related to the latest espionage scandal or dissatisfaction within the Blue House.

CONFIRMATION PROCESS

¶5. (C) Regardless of the reasons behind Kim's departure, incoming Kim will experience loud opposition during the confirmation process. As the only member of the cabinet who is subject to a formal recommendation by a National Assembly committee, some officials are concerned that the opposition GNP Party may use the process as an opportunity to delay Kim's approval thereby expressing their objection to other cabinet appointments for which their input is not required for ratification. Intelligence committee member Gong Song-jin told poloff that even though there would be resistance from the GNP, there was no way to block Kim's nomination. He said the committee has tried to block previous appointments to NIS, but had failed due to lack of votes in the Uri dominated Intelligence Committee. He said that as long as the Uri Party voted together, Kim would pass through the committee. NOTE: The Intelligence Committee that will review Kim's nomination is comprised of 7 Uri Party members and 5 GNP members. END NOTE. Representative Choi Jae-cheon (also a member of the Intelligence Committee), in an internal Uri Party meeting, spoke out strongly against Kim's appointment. He said that Kim was not qualified for the position and would have retired had he not met Lee Jong-seok while at the Sejong Institute. He saw this as "code" personnel and internally expressed strong views against Kim's nomination but, that said, allowed that Kim would pass through the committee without major problems.

VERSHBOW